

## **Message from the Italian Government for International Education Week 2011**

It is a great pleasure to provide Italian Government's support for the 12<sup>th</sup> annual International Education Week, a remarkable initiative whose spirit and goals we hold in high regard.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, cross-cultural contacts have increased exponentially and, therefore, international education is of the essence. Learning foreign languages in this day and age is of paramount importance, and hence initiatives which raise awareness on this topic are invaluable. Through them students are exposed to, and therefore learn to appreciate, other cultures and values and acquire the knowledge to function effectively in today's society.

The Italian Government is committed to promoting and sustaining Italian language and culture throughout the United States, as well as to enhancing foreign language learning in the Italian education system.

Nearly 90,000 people in the U.S. are learning Italian through our *Enti Gestori*, local non-profit organizations financed in part by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Their aim is to organize Italian language courses in primary and secondary schools, which are often fully integrated in academic curricula throughout the United States.

Each year scholarships are allocated to both Italian citizens who wish to study in the United States and to U.S. citizens who wish to study in Italy.

The Ministry of Italian Foreign Affairs sends Italian lecturers to teach in American universities. According to the *Modern Language Association*, between 1998 and 2009 – little more than a decade – students of Italian in American universities rose by 61% passing the 80,000 threshold. The growth in interest in Italian language and culture is also proved by the fact that Italy is the first non-English speaking country destination for American students – over 27,000 travelled to Italy to study in 2009.

In this framework, the reinstatement of Italian in the AP program starting this school year (2011-2012) marks a pivotal milestone. The *Italian Language Observatory*, which coordinates all activities pertaining to the promotion of the Italian language in the United States, was created by the Embassy of Italy in collaboration with teachers, experts and Italian-American organizations as a response to the growing interest in our language and culture.

In much the same way, Italy is actively promoting English language learning. English lessons often start in Kindergarten, become compulsory in primary school and continue throughout secondary school.

In addition, in compliance with the most recent secondary school reform, English is also used as the teaching language for other subjects (such as history and geography) in the last year of secondary school (13<sup>th</sup> grade).

To sum up, education is yet another field which our Countries seek to improve together and, thereby, is a field which brings our Countries closer together too.

The Italian Government would like to thank, and congratulate, the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, and the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, together with their staff, for organizing such a successful week of educational events.